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NOTES ON CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS IN SPITI.[1]

BY H. CALVERT, I.C.S.

(Communicated by H. A. Rose.)

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SPITI is a portion of the Kullû Subdivision of the Kângrâ District of the Panjab on the Tibetan border. The following notes were made by Mr. Calvert during a tour in 1904.

I.

Customs connected with the Social Relations.

Betrothal.

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Betrothal is usually preceded by verbal inquiries through a relative or friend as to whether the father of the girl is agreeable, who usually takes with him a needle as an emblem of the well-being of the family making the enquiry.[2]

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If the girl's father intimates his acceptance of the proposal, the boy's father takes some *chang* (barley brew) and *khâta* (cloth) to him. If the girl's father drinks the *chang*, the betrothal is complete.

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A *lâma* is then consulted as to an auspicious day for the wedding, which may be six months or a year later. The boy's father has already referred to the *lâma* to ascertain if the marriage is likely to be fortunate before he made proposals for the betrothal.

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If, after betrothal and before marriage, the girl prefers another man, or is married by her parents to another man, the first *fiancé* is given a pony or a sum of money as compensation.

If a young boy be left an orphan, his relatives select a grown-up woman as his wife, to look after him and his property as foster-mother as well as wife. The boy cannot on attaining his majority marry a second wife.

Marriage.

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Marriage within the *gotî* is prohibited, but interchange of sisters is allowed and cousins may marry.

A man may marry a woman of an inferior *gotî*, but a woman must, if possible, marry a man of superior *gotî*.

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[1] In Tibetan, sPiti.

[2] A needle, sent by one relative or friend to another by PEOPLE WHO CANNOT WRITE IS A SIGN OF THE WELL-BEING OF THE SENDER.

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Divorce.

A son-in-law who has been adopted cannot be divorced by his wife as in Ladákh. 586

There is no custom in Spiti of a widow divorcing herself from her dead husband.

Unfaithfulness and refusal to cohabit are reasons for divorce, but incompatibility of temper is not.

In cases of divorce both parties go to the Nono.

If the woman is in fault, her jewels and *perák* (head ornament) and a pony are given to the husband. If the man is in fault, a field is given to the woman for her maintenance, but she can only retain it so long as she does not marry again. The man may re-marry. [587]

A wife's adultery is usually condoned by the present of a few rupees to the injured husband. A husband's unfaithfulness usually only results in a quarrel. A single lapse is not ground for a divorce, and only cohabitation with his paramour can give his wife right to a divorce. 586 937

Pregnancy.

A married woman wears white breeches till she is pregnant, when she wears red or black. Unmarried girls wear white breeches up to twelve and afterwards red or black. 843 292

Naming.

The name of a child is selected by a *lámo* after reference to the Sacred Books, who receives for the service a *khátá*, or piece of cloth, such as is given by visitors to a monastery. 553 793

When naming the child, the *lámo* places a little bit of cloth upon it, or, if the child be not present, sends the cloth to its parents.

In every monastery *kesar*, or green, water is kept; i.e., water in which *késar*, saffron, has been placed. And sometimes, but not always, when naming a child, the *lámo* sprinkles it with *késar* water.

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by people who cannot write, is a sign of the well-being 000

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The wealthy take their children to the monastery to be named and pay a heavy fee, but the poor bring the *lâma* to their homes, feed him and give him a small present of cash or grain.

The child to be named must be over a year old and may be as much as three years old.

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If a child die without being named, it is buried. If it dies after the naming ceremony, the Sacred Books are consulted as to the disposal of the body.

The naming ceremony is not considered to have any effect on the child's future.

Adoption.

a.—*Where there is no son.*

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If a land-owner have no son, but only a daughter, she is ordinarily married to a man ranking as an adopted son. This man must be a younger son and so able to leave his father's house. He is not in any way looked down on.

However, if the land-owner have a younger brother who would ordinarily be a *lâma* he can object, because a son-in-law can only be taken into the house as heir with his consent, and he can claim to cohabit with the land-owner's wife and beget a son. Or, if the wife be old, he can marry another woman and try and get a son by her. If he does, the elder sonless brother is turned into the *khang chung*, and the *lâma* takes possession of the *khang chhen*.

b.—*Where there is no child.*

If there is no child and no younger brother, or if the younger brother does not object, the land-owner adopts a married man of his own *got*, or he adopts a girl and finds a husband for her who is made his heir. If in this case, the younger brother objects he can be bought off with a field or a pony or money or some similar present.

c.—*The adopted son.*

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Once a man is adopted as a son, he cannot be set aside, but there can be no adoption if a real son exists. If, after adopting a son, a real son is born, the latter becomes a younger son, and has to become a *lâma* or is given a field for maintenance, while the adopted son gets the main portion of the land. The real son cannot object.

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It must be remembered that in a land where only the eldest son marries and all the younger sons are celibate, a sonless land-owner naturally has no relations in the male line to adopt.

d.—Where there is a childless widow.

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If a man dies childless, his widow first marries his younger brother. Failing him, she may marry any man of her husband's *got*. But the land is considered her property till she has borne a son, who, on attaining his majority, steps into the *khang chhen*.

Cremation.

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Coffins are not used in Spiti for want of wood. Corpses are carried in a sitting posture to the burning-ground either on a man's shoulder or in a blanket held by four men.

II.

Social Ideas.

Asceticism.

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Hermits exist and are said to subsist on nothing but tea and one morning meal.

Excommunication.

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A man can be excommunicated for eating with a man or cohabiting with a woman of lower caste than himself. The decision is announced by public proclamation.

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The *lâmas* taking no part in this, but they turn out a *lâma* who misbehaves himself and he is never taken back in any circumstances.

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An excommunicated layman can be received back into caste after ceremonies. He has to read a book on *shakspa* or penitential offerings, burn a lamp in front of a *deota*, feast the *lâmas*, and may be ordered to make 100 or 1,000 prostrations before some *deota* in a monastery.

Leprosy.

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Leprosy is found in one village in Spiti, ascribed to the water of a spring, wherein lives a devil, Chutalwâ.

If a man passes the spring on a day when the devil happens to be present, he is liable to get leprosy.

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A leper is not allowed to marry, but if married, he is not separated from his wife. He feeds by himself in a separate room and the villagers will not eat with him.

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Dancing

635 All the people dance on occasions of merriment, — girls and men. At Kuling, while the Buzhans were dancing six or eight girls joined in.

554 535. Professional dancing women are looked down and the peasant-proprietors will not eat with them. They are not usually prostitutes, though the unmarried ones may be.

III.

Objects connected with Religion.

Cenotaphs.

778 Strictly speaking, the **chorten** is an object of worship; the **dungten** is a bone receptacle. The *chorten*, usually made of wood, is the substitute for the *dungten*, which contains the bones of some abbot or saint and is situated too far away for practical worship.

Such is the origin, but in modern usage the *chorten* is merely a Buddhist symbol, and like a brass *deota*, may have no relation to any special *dungten* or to the bones of any particular saint.

Altars.

778 788 Heaps of stones are erected to local spirits— to the *lha* of the pass or ravine and so on,— and every passer-by adds a stone or a horn. Horns are more acceptable to the *lha* than stones and the most acceptable gift is a *lungta* (cloth with prayers printed on it).

Every traveller adds a stone, even if in a strange place, where he does not know to which *lha* the altar has been erected. A white stone is the best. Black stones are from the evil spirits and are never placed on the heap. Usually a fallen stone is replaced and only when there are no fallen stones is a fresh one sought for.

A *lungta* is only added on special occasions. Thus, when a merchant sets out on a trading venture, he leaves a *lungta* containing a prayer for his success, his name and the name of the year.

IV.

Superstitions.

Magic Dagger.

787 The *dorja phurpa* or magic dagger is used by the *choba*, attendant on the sick, and by the

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789 Bushans of Pin. It has three edges and an elaborate handle.

An old trick of the Bushans, which I have seen them perform, is to wave the magic dagger over a stone and then to place the stone on a man's chest and break it in two by hurling another stone on to it.

Amulets.

751 The *shungwa* is an amulet containing a paper, with *mantras* and prayers against sickness, falling stones and so on, written by some well-known abbot.

The *chhoh shun* is an amulet specially worn during a journey.

Lucky and unlucky days.

777 Special days are lucky or unlucky for special acts; *e. g.*, starting on a journey, cutting a crop, sowing a field, and so on. Everyone knows these, and *lámas* are only consulted for special occasions.

Unlucky days for journeys, when there is no time to wait, are thus evaded. All you have to do is to walk 20 or 30 paces in the opposite direction to that of your journey and you can go on your way rejoicing.

There are no lucky days for crossing the Spiti River.

[793] Unlucky days for actions, which must be performed, are thus evaded. Call a *láma* to read certain *mantras* and pay him a fee in money or grain and all will be well.

Hares.

262 The people of Spiti will not eat hares, as they hold them to be a kind of donkey. The name for them (*ribong*) means wild ass.

Earthquakes.

823 The God of the Earth is a frog and occasionally shakes it, as it is balanced on his back.

Deformities.

732 A child born with an extra finger is lucky, but
777 a child born with the number short or with the fingers incomplete is unlucky. The people do not admit killing off such children.

Glossary

[H or T following the words are abbreviations for Hindi and Tibetan, respectively. -- Analyst]

Deota (H)	god
Got (H)	sib
Khang chhen (T)	big house
Khang chung (T)	small house
Nono (T)	Title of the Chief of Spiti